

SPARKLING DEBUT DAY IS A TONIC

84/85

NEW SIGNING David Preece went home with a bottle of champagne in his bag on Saturday night after a Kenilworth Road debut that left him sparkling with memories of "a dream come true".

The 21-year-old midfield man plucked from Third Division Walsall to try to stop the Town sinking into the Second Division became an instant local hero with a winning goal that ended the Town's run of six league games without a win.

He and new skipper Steve Foster, who was making his home debut, won a bottle of bubbly each from the sponsors as joint "Man Of The Match".

A re-shaped team, with Frank Bunn pushed forward to spearhead the attack, outplayed Aston Villa for the whole of the first half, matched them in the second, and earned the points that lifted them one place up the table.

Only Villa goalkeeper Nigel Spink prevented a much more clear-cut victory, and his efforts almost salvaged a point for his side because at the other end Les Sealey had to make a superb tip-over from a shot by Gordon Cowans to deny him a late equaliser.

Preece found the pace of First Division football much hotter than the Third, and admitted that the going became difficult for him in the second half.

"You get more space to play in, but it's much faster," he said. "Luton have got some good players, and all it needs to get moving is a bit of confidence."

Chirpy and active as a sparrow, Preece looks as though he will supply that, as well as a quality service linking defence with attack and a willingness to get up quickly in support of the front men and have a go at goal.

Four times he did that on his debut. The first was a rising 25-yarder which Spink tipped over, the second took an unlucky deflection for a corner and

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

the third was saved by Spink.

The one that counted, in the 39th minute, was a little lucky. Brian Stein took on two or three men in a run down the right wing, pulled back the cross and Preece mishit his shot from the edge of the box. "I think that's why it went in," he said. "When I hit shots cleanly Spink got to them."

The Villa goalkeeper was one of the first to congratulate Preece on a memorable debut, on a day when most of the Town team had cause to take pleasure from providing the battling spirit manager David Pleat demanded.

Foster played nearly half the match with a head wound that needed five stitches, but he and Mal Donaghy were rock solid when Villa tried to get back into the game after the interval.

The first half looked like a visiting team content to defend against a home side badly in need of a little luck to get the confidence flowing again. Preece's goal changed all that, but Villa didn't have the same depths of heart and resilience as the Town when they needed it.

"Luton wanted to win a bit more than we did," said their manager, Graham Turner.

Wayne Turner was taken out of midfield and reverted to left-back in place of Mitchell Thomas, and

he and Preece immediately struck up a useful understanding.

Garry Parker and Ricky Hill were free to use most of their energy on attack, and the return of David Moss on the left wing gave the side a much more balanced look.

Left-winger Mark Walters was the only Villa man who looked capable of upsetting the Town, but he wasted his best chance early in the second half by shooting wide.

The Town always looked likely winners after Preece's goal, and hints of the old flowing style emerged after the interval when Villa had to push more men forward and left themselves open to quick counter-attacks. They were not helped by losing midfielder Steve McMahon with an ankle injury in the second half.

Bunn put a flying header wide, Hill sidestepped his man delicately and chipped just a little too high and in the last six minutes Spink made the save of the match, getting a hand to another bullet of a header by Bunn when a save seemed impossible.

Bunn is still not convinced that the ball did not cross the line before the keeper dragged it back.

But there is a conviction on one matter at Kenilworth Road today: the fight for First Division safety is nowhere near lost yet.

THE FIRST DIVISION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Everton	18	10	4	4	35	23	34
Tottenham	18	10	3	5	37	18	33
Man Utd	18	9	5	4	35	24	32
Arsenal	18	10	2	6	34	25	32
Southampton	18	8	7	3	22	17	31
West Brom	18	8	4	6	32	24	28
Chelsea	18	7	6	5	30	19	27
Sheff Wed	18	7	6	5	29	21	27
Liverpool	18	7	6	5	24	19	27
Nottm Forest	18	8	3	7	29	26	27
Norwich	18	7	5	6	26	25	26
West Ham	18	7	5	6	23	25	26
Newcastle	18	6	6	6	31	34	24
Sunderland	18	6	5	7	25	26	23
QPR	18	5	7	6	23	29	22
Watford	18	5	6	7	36	36	21
Leicester	18	6	3	9	31	35	21
Aston Villa	18	5	5	8	21	33	20
Ipswich	18	4	7	7	19	24	19
Luton Town	18	4	5	9	21	36	17
Coventry	18	4	4	10	17	32	16
Stoke City	18	1	4	13	13	42	7